

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
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Memorandum for: Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper  
Subject : Background Information on Guatemala

2003

Perhaps the best way to describe the Guatemalan problem is to call it serious, but transitory.

The problem is serious because Communism has been growing and developing in Guatemala for at least ten years and is now the most influential political creed in the country. This creed is put into vigorous daily practice by at least one hundred top Guatemalan Communists, men who have been trained in the Soviet Union, who have genuine stature as Communists go, men who form an integral part of the international Communist conspiracy. Behind these men are between 1,500 and 3,000 loyal Communist Party members who are available for the propaganda, agitation, and organization work that a Communist machine requires.

The vigor and efficiency of this Communist hard core far exceed any other political force now active in Guatemala. The Communists have considerable influence with Guatemala's President, Jacobo ARBENZ Guzman, who by his own testimony, relies on the Communists to put into effect what he calls a program of "social reform." Three pro-Government political parties, leftist in tinge, are generally swamped by Communist determination and more or less willingly follow the Communist lead. Skillful Communist agitators



and organizers have captured control of the urban labor federation and have formed an alliance, which amounts to their having control, with the labor federation for rural workers. Actual Communists or Communist sympathizers occupy many vital positions in the Guatemalan Government. Through all these channels, through President Arbenz himself, through the other leftist political parties, through the labor unions, and through government agencies, the Communists exert heavy propagandistic pressure and considerable control over the destiny of Guatemala.

The influence of the Guatemalan Communists naturally does not stop at home. Guatemalan Communist leaders were trained by international Communism, and they maintain close, disciplined liaison with the center of international Communism in Moscow.

Jose Manuel FORTUNEY, the Secretary General of the Guatemalan Communist Party—which interestingly enough only calls itself the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo or Guatemalan labor party—visited Moscow as recently as last October and stayed for several weeks. Victor Manuel GUTIERREZ, the top figure on the Guatemalan labor scene, is a disciple and close associate of Vincente LOMBARDO Tolédano, the top Communist labor leader in all South America. Guatemalan delegations can be found at virtually all the Communist sponsored peace congresses, labor congresses, and other propagandistic rallies held behind the Iron Curtain.

The role of the Guatemalan Communist in the Kremlin conspiracy is not limited to discipleship alone. In their turn, the Guatemalan Communists have trained certainly dozens and probably hundreds of high and medium level Communists from other Central American and South American countries. Generally speaking, when a Communist in a Central American country gets into difficulties at home, he can find refuge, a well-paid job, and often a public post of major responsibility in Guatemala. In addition, the Guatemalan Government and Communist Party appear on numerous occasions to have financed or subsidised Communist propaganda espionage activities in countries that neighbor on theirs. Last, but far from least, the rumors will not die down that the Guatemalans are playing a leading part in the organization, training, and equipment of a relatively formidable Communist Legion which could one day be used to perform the military tasks of international Communism anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.

All in all, then, Guatemala looks as a formidable Communist bastion and cancer in the Americas. From the American point of view we might call Guatemala our soft underbelly. All of these things amply justify the statement that the situation in Guatemala is serious.

However, there is also reason to believe that the present Guatemalan situation is transitory. The Guatemalan Communist Party is strong, yes, but it represents only a tiny minority in a country

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of three million people. What is more, no matter what the Communists may claim, this minority does not really spring from the Guatemalan people but consists chiefly of rebellious eggheads—people who can talk a good Marxist line about the plight of the peasant or the plight of the laborer but have themselves had relatively little experience in tilling the soil or working in the factory. Finally, the Guatemalan Communists are not talking a native language, but a Russian one, and from what we know of the national pride and dignity of the Latin American people, it is hard to believe that they would ever for long meekly submit to domination and exploitation by a Slavic power five thousand miles away.

Guatemala in the long past had a glorious civilization and a brilliant culture. The magnificent monuments of pre-Spanish and Spanish times give the traveler a striking impression of what creative resources may lie within the capacity of the Guatemalan people. These resources are surely so great that the shoddy materialistic philosophy of Communism will never permanently satisfy the Guatemalan people. What is more, the Guatemalan people are intensely religious, and there is every probability that their Christian convictions will lead them to disown Marxism-Atheism the more they see its true implications.

As is elsewhere the case with Communist-dominated countries, it will be wise for Americans to keep in mind the clear distinction between the Communist government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan people

themselves. Americans can have nothing in common with Communists, but they have every reason, during these days of trial for the Guatemalan people, to reaffirm, to extend, and to intensify the historic friendship that traditionally links our two independent, sovereign, self-governing, friendly neighbors in the Americas.